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REVIEWS.

A VOLUME OF LITERARY ESSAYS.

STUDIES AND APPRECIATIONS. By Lewis E. Gates. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1900.

It is always with a certain shrinking that one takes up a new book of critical essays. They come in never ending streams; and if one can lay aside a volume without weariness, the very negative is high praise. We cannot say that Prof. Gates's book has held us entranced from beginning to end, but whatever weariness we may have got from the eternal attempt to find a scientific basis for criticism is far more than atoned for by the interest and value of the other papers. One difficult thing for critics to remain conscious of is the somewhat humbling fact that, in spite of their usefulness in molding thought, they are, after all, but workers in another's vineyard. The true worth of criticism comes primarily from the thing criticised. The revelation of an imaginative mind's emotions in reading one of Rossetti's sonnets may have two values—a value in pointing out the enjoyment to be got from the poem, coupled with some directions as to how that enjoyment is to be attained, and a psychological value in response to the universal sympathy felt with the workings of an imaginative mind. The latter value may make a pseudo-critical essay into a real work of art or a contribution to the study of the soul, but it is not criticism. There are in the world certain works of art from which a man endowed with imaginative sympathy and provided with trained intelligence can secure a fine and high pleasure. The work, and the worthy work, of the critic is first to judge so clearly of works of art that he will be in no danger of mistaking, in the large, one of low appeal with one of high; then his contribution to the advancement of civilization is completed by his rendering possible, so far as in him lies, an enjoyment of these noble works of art. If critics would be proudly humble enough to recog-

nize the fact that they were in a way only intellectual jobbers, their work would be better done. If the sensitive critics will pardon the vulgar analogy, it may be more desirable to be a manufacturer of thought than a retailer, but neither of these constitute a world, nor both. The matter of real importance is that the consumer get the article he needs so that he may have life more abundantly. When this is borne in mind much of the unnecessary bother about impressionism *et al.* is seen to be needless. Impressionism is to a certain extent essential in any criticism that is not purely formal, but it does not any more constitute criticism than the enjoyment of a sunset makes a man an artist. If a critic were perfect and omniscient, his *dicta*, his methods of utilizing the material upon which the spirit of man can operate, would be all-sufficient; impressionism would be criticism, but under no other conditions could it be. One man cannot judge for a race. In forming his judgment every intellectual and imaginative faculty in the critic must be concentrated in the effort to see things as they are objectively; then his personality, the expression of his own emotions, must come in to add the infinite charm of humanity to his endeavor to bring others to the happy sensations he has had in the presence of the work of art. All this is without doubt but homespun common sense, but this humble ingredient enters little into the speculations of critics about themselves and their art. Vital criticism must not be parasitical, it must not be an ignoble organism draining life from a noble one, but it must be the honest and high effort to bring others into the participation of good which without criticism would be wholly or partially beyond them. As Saint Beuve puts it, the critic needs only the faculty of reading with enjoyment and of judging at the same time, because his whole duty as critic is to judge whatsoever things are good, whatsoever things are pure, and to make them to be enjoyed.

We have drifted thus far afield because some of Prof. Gates's critical articles are so entirely what critical articles should be that we could not avoid pointing out wherein, in his

discussion of his own method, he seemed unworthy of his work. The nature of the papers, "The Romantic Movement" and "The Return to Conventional Life," may be inferred from the titles. Romanticism was inevitable if any progress was to come in English poetry, because the perfection of the school of Pope was sterile, the soul seemed nigh unto death; and return was equally inevitable, because humanity is not balanced if it could sink to the Dead Sea flats of the eighteenth century poetry; it could be raised again only by a vast upheaval, and this upheaval, in its turn, was sure to go too far. One of the finest elements in Prof. Gates's equipment as a critic is the sure hold he has on the truth that literature must touch life, common life, to be essentially great. Thus he judges romanticism not perfect because exaggerated, yet not absurd because a step toward truth; thus he recognizes the necessity of the operation of English conservatism and the powers of equilibrium in returning to their place the conventions which the romanticists would have naught of.

It is this, we believe, which gives the value to the two discriminating essays on Tennyson. Tennyson had great enough intellectual power to perceive that the world was steadily drifting away from the aristocratic notions held in a way by all Englishmen, who are the Pharisees of the soul, and in particular by Englishmen of position, on toward socialism, but he was too little of a seer to find in it much save the blundering and vulgarity of the majority. Tennyson saw this, but his whole make-up had in it so much of the woman and of the aristocrat that, in spite of loyal efforts, he could not bring himself to accept on its face value the reality of modern life. He had none of Carlyle's fierce sincerity as to the worth of present life, its spiritual significance, its infinite and overwhelming importance. His delicious dreaming is but delicious dreaming. Prof. Gates makes this point with great clearness, a clearness all the more essential inasmuch as it is unusual. Criticism by extract may be, as James Russell Lowell called it, *Bæotian*, but it is final in this instance. No one who will read with sympathy and

open-mindedness the poems which Prof. Gates touches on can fail to respect and value his conclusions. To this aristocratic and effeminate aloofness Tennyson added a morbidity which is most crass in "Maud," and least offensive, though eternally present, in "In Memoriam." No amount of beauty of diction and infinite melody of verse can atone for these great faults—faults which stamp Tennyson permanently as below the greatest of the very great. He had no grasp on common life. Tennyson utilizes the morbidly remarkable in life for his material, as in "Maud," or he sees the ordinary in life through the splendid vapors of his own poetic brain, as in "Enoch Arden." "Fancy," says Prof. Gates, after quoting the description of Enoch on the desert island, "fancy Robinson Crusoe trying to find his mind mirrored in Tennyson's rodomontade."

We can speak of only one other essay before we commend the whole to readers—that on Poe. It is perhaps but the sensitiveness of patriotic pride when one shrinks from the auction-sale-like enumeration of Poe's poetic paraphernalia at the beginning of the essay. We know that Poe has in him more of real poetic force than any of our other poets, and we rather like to hear this emphasized, but it is true that he uses very uniform and rather artificial material out of which to get his marvelous effects. Poe is not great, but his cleverness—intellectual in the "Tales" and musical in poems—has produced a remarkable illusion to this effect. The shallowness of Poe's treatment of life, his artificiality, his remarkable intellectual power, and his artistic shrewdness, are developed convincingly. Poe seems, curiously enough, a sort of intellectual Yankee, with that individual's touch of sentimentalism made degenerate by dissipation.

It is the fashion to-day to be weary of Macaulay's style as of his critical judgments, but one sometimes wishes that men were wise enough to choose the good and let the evil go. Macaulay is monotonous, but he is clear. We know what he means, and he does not set us to wondering if the sentence will ever end, or start us to running over our mind's stock of words to see if we can find anything similar to one he uses.

Prof. Gates cannot be acquitted on either charge: witness many sentences and words such as "envisaging," "awareness," "teen," "subdual."

GEORGE CLIFTON EDWARDS.

NEW ITALIAN JOURNEYS.

ITALIAN CITIES. By E. H. and E. W. Blaishfield. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

For every lover of Italy, particularly for every lover of Italian art, these volumes are a pure delight. America has made no worthier contribution, unless it be Mr. Berenson's admirable little volumes on the "Painters of the Italian Renaissance." But Mr. and Mrs. Blaishfield have an advantage over Mr. Berenson in a charming literary style that makes the reading of their book a pleasure and not a study—a style flexible, vigorous, and entirely suited to the subject, finished enough for the most exacting, yet thoroughly comprehensible to plain people, with none of those superrefined affectations that make Mr. Maurice Hewlett's "Earthworks out of Tuscany" so delightful to some and so exasperating to others.

In the great majority of cases artists are cultivated only in their eyes and hands. They can see things with what in "Trilby" is so aptly called a "prehensile eye," and can represent them faithfully; but in general culture and in a knowledge of art history they are sadly deficient. This is particularly so with the artists of continental Europe. They paint with immense cleverness, but their works too often suffer from a want of intellectual interest.

The artists of England and America have more frequently been cultivated men; and whether in culture or artistic skill, Mr. Blaishfield has had no superior among us. The emblematic figures that adorn the dome of the new Congressional Library have made him universally known as the foremost decorative artist of America, and the edition of Vasari's "Lives of the Painters" which he and his accomplished wife issued in conjunction with Mr. Hopkins gave them a very high rank among the students of Italian art. But while